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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Cambodia's Role in the Movement of Arms and  
Ammunition to the Vietnamese Communists*

**Secret**

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July 1968

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
July 1968

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Cambodia's Role in the Movement  
of Arms and Ammunition to the  
Vietnamese Communists

Summary

There is increasing evidence -- albeit mainly circumstantial -- that Communist forces in the III and IV Corps areas of South Vietnam are receiving an important share of their arms and ammunition via southeastern Cambodia. Communist forces in the northern half of South Vietnam receive some Cambodian supplies, primarily foodstuffs, through northeastern Cambodia. However, these forces receive their arms and ammunition almost exclusively from North Vietnam, through Laos and the DMZ (see Figure 1).

It is still not clear whether the materiel moving across the border in southeastern Cambodia is smuggled into Cambodia by sea infiltration, comes from supplies stored by the Communists on Cambodian territory after moving through Laos and/or South Vietnam, or -- as a lesser possibility -- from Cambodian stocks. The balance of evidence does indicate, however, that military shipments delivered to Sihanoukville are moved directly to Cambodian military bases, and that the volume of Communist military assistance to Cambodia is consistent with Cambodia's needs.

The quantities of arms shipped through southeastern Cambodia cannot be determined, but even relatively small, occasional deliveries would contribute significantly to the small requirements of Communist forces in the III and IV Corps areas -- estimated at less than 7 tons per day of arms and

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ammunition at the levels noted during the Tet offensive and some 3 tons daily at current levels of combat.

The implication of Cambodian military and civilian personnel in some smuggling of arms and ammunition appears fairly certain, but we have no convincing evidence that officials at the highest levels of government are involved. Recent steps by Sihanouk and his regime to tighten anti-smuggling controls are not likely to stamp out the smuggling from Cambodia to South Vietnam.

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**Figure 1**



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Introduction

1. Cambodia, because it borders on much of South Vietnam and because it is not subjected to Allied air attack or coastal patrol, offers the Vietnamese Communists potential supplementary or alternate routes for the safe movement of military supplies to Communist forces in South Vietnam. Their capability for exploiting this potential is facilitated by the normal commercial traffic that moves across the border; the nature of the 675-mile border between the two countries, most of which does not lend itself to effective patrolling; a 200-mile coastline, most of which is lightly patrolled; and

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Moreover, the well-documented Communist use of Cambodian territory for sanctuary, the infiltration of men, and the smuggling of foodstuffs suggests that Communist strategy would incorporate an attempt to move arms and ammunition through Cambodia. The main reason against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese use of Cambodia for the regular movement of arms and ammunition -- in Communist eyes -- probably would be the desire not to antagonize Prince Sihanouk, who apparently wants to convince the United States and the rest of the world of his determination not to countenance such traffic and thereby keep Cambodia from being drawn into the war. The Communists presumably would also be reluctant to depend on a logistics system which smugglers or bribed officials would have the power to compromise.

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2. Nevertheless, several circumstances in 1968 have combined to reinforce earlier reports that, whatever their origin, important quantities of arms and ammunition are moved from Cambodia to Communist forces in South Vietnam. These include

a. the display of improved and increased Communist firepower in the III and IV Corps areas of South Vietnam;

b. the receipt of more credible reports from Viet Cong prisoners and ralliers on Cambodia's involvement in arms traffic for Communist forces;

c. The destruction of arms-laden sampans in inland waterways in South Vietnam near the Cambodian border; and

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d. The lack of firm evidence that arms and ammunition are reaching Communist forces in the southern half of South Vietnam by overland routes through South Vietnam or by sea infiltration directly into South Vietnam.

Increased Communist Firepower

3. Communist ammunition expenditures in 1968, as in 1967, have been heaviest in the I Corps area, which is independent of logistic support from Cambodia. Expenditures in the III and IV Corps areas, however, both of which are contiguous to Cambodia, have increased measurably. Moreover, since mid-April Allied forces in the III Corps area have captured much larger caches of Communist ammunition than in earlier months.

4. Much of the increased expenditure reflects the introduction of more and heavier, crew-served weapons into the Communists' arsenal in the southern half of the country. During the first two weeks of the Tet offensive, Allied forces in the III Corps area received heavy 122-mm rocket fire, with six tons (more than 130 rockets) of this ammunition reported fired on the Tan Son Nhut Airfield and Bien Hoa in one day. For comparison, average daily enemy ammunition expenditures throughout all of South Vietnam under normal combat conditions during 1967 were estimated at eleven tons. The average daily munitions requirements of enemy troops in the III and IV Corps areas were estimated at about 1.9 tons and 1.0 tons, respectively, in 1967, and about 5.4 tons and 1.4 tons during the Tet offensive.

5. Although the levels of expenditures in the III Corps area during the Tet offensive have not been sustained, heavy mortar and sporadic rocket fire continue above 1967 levels at the present time. Recently in the IV Corps area there also has been heavy Communist fire from 82-mm and 120-mm mortars and the B-40 rocket launcher.

Reported Arms Traffic from Cambodia to South Vietnam

6. The numerous low-level reports of the movement of arms and ammunition to Communist troops through Cambodia have been supplemented in recent months by more credible intelligence. In March 1968,



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Cambodia seized a junk carrying Chinese weapons and ammunition near Koh Ses Island off the Cambodian coast. Although the government claimed that the armaments were destined for the Khmer "Reds," a small dissident force sympathetic to the Communists.

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[REDACTED] A March 1968 magazine article by a Cambodian general pointed up the considerable obstacles in preventing smuggling that are presented by the nature of Cambodia's coast and Cambodia's lack of patrol vessels.

7. With respect to movement within Cambodia, a Viet Cong rallier reported [REDACTED] that his unit was charged with escorting supplies -- almost entirely arms and ammunition -- and protecting the infiltration route from Tonhon in southern Cambodia to the Vinh Te Canal which parallels the Cambodian - South Vietnam border in Chau Doc Province. According to the rallier, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] supplies were moved on sampans via canal during the wet season and on two-wheeled hand carts during the dry season. The rallier's unit was said to operate almost exclusively in Cambodian territory. According to another Viet Cong cadre, who was reporting information gathered from Viet Cong sources ostensibly knowledgeable about enemy logistics, arms and ammunition were moved through Cambodia to Tonhon under a system in operation since 1966.

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8. North Vietnamese Lieutenant Colonel [REDACTED] who rallied to the Allied forces [REDACTED] understood that most of the supplies cached some ten miles northwest of Saigon came from Cambodia where, according to him, "movement is easier." The supplies of which he spoke clearly included arms and ammunition. He went on to say that although there was liaison between the Viet Cong and the Cambodian corps commander on the border, the Cambodian Army itself did not resupply the Viet Cong.

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9. An earlier indication of Communist arms traffic through Cambodia is found in a captured diary, which related that between January and March of 1967 the

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writer was assigned to receive and transport "war materiels" in Cambodia which were moved in "vehicles driven by Cambodians."

10. The destruction and capture of arms-laden sampans in South Vietnam immediately south of Cambodia's Svay Rieng Province in February strongly indicated the probable existence of substantial arms caches in long-established Communist havens concentrated in the Ba Thu area of Svay Rieng. Twenty-three secondary explosions were reported in the course of the destruction of 76 enemy sampans just south of Ba Thu on 16 February. A sweep of the area by Allied ground troops on the following day netted eight sampans, five Soviet heavy machineguns, 240 cases of Chinese Communist ammunition, more than a ton of 60-mm mortar rounds, and some 1,000 rounds of rocket and other mortar ammunition. Air observers noted more than 500 loaded sampans moving south and east from the general Ba Thu area during all of February; and aerial surveillance in October 1967 showed a comparable level of traffic. The results of the successful raids on 16-17 February indicate that at least some of the sampans probably carried arms.

11. Numerous reports from prisoners of war and defectors indicate that Ba Thu, a village inhabited largely by ethnic Vietnamese, has long been used as a support base by the Communists, with facilities for limited armaments production, the publication of propaganda material, medical treatment, and military training.\* On the other hand, neither prisoners nor captured documents actually have described Ba Thu as an important base for storing or transshipping arms and ammunition.

12. Much recent intelligence on arms traffic through Cambodia has been of a more questionable nature. Although some of the continuing flow of low-level reports of arms smuggling can be neither confirmed nor denied, many reports appear to confuse Cambodian supply movements in border areas with

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\* Following the receipt of US evidence of Vietnamese Communist activities in the Ba Thu area, Cambodian military units reportedly cleared a part of the area in March 1968.

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Vietnamese Communist support activity. Still others appear to be inconsistent with Communist needs. For example, the 2,200 tons of arms and ammunition alleged to have been smuggled through Tonhon into Chau Doc Province of South Vietnam in 1967 would be adequate for almost a year's requirements for enemy troops in all of the III and IV Corps areas engaged in daily combat at the high levels reached during the Tet offensive.

13. The quantities of arms and munitions involved in smuggling to the Communists through Cambodia cannot be ascertained. Some low-level sources report, for example, deliveries in convoys of six trucks or more. Even one six-truck convoy, with each truck carrying three tons of armaments, would move enough to meet enemy requirements in the III and IV Corps areas under normal combat conditions for six days, or for almost three days at the rate of combat during the Tet offensive.

Communist Military Aid to Cambodia

14. On 16 February 1968 the USSR signed an agreement to provide some \$5.8 million worth of military aid to Cambodia in 1968-69. This is the largest individual military aid package concluded by Cambodia with a Communist country. Equipment covered by the agreement includes one MIG-15 trainer, one BIG BAR radar station, infantry arms, field and antiaircraft artillery, spare parts, and ammunition. During the negotiations, the USSR apparently also offered to sell to Cambodia more than 1,000 vehicles and other military items. Extensions of military aid by the Communist countries -- predominantly the USSR and Communist China -- between December 1963 and January 1968 are valued at an estimated \$13.6 million.

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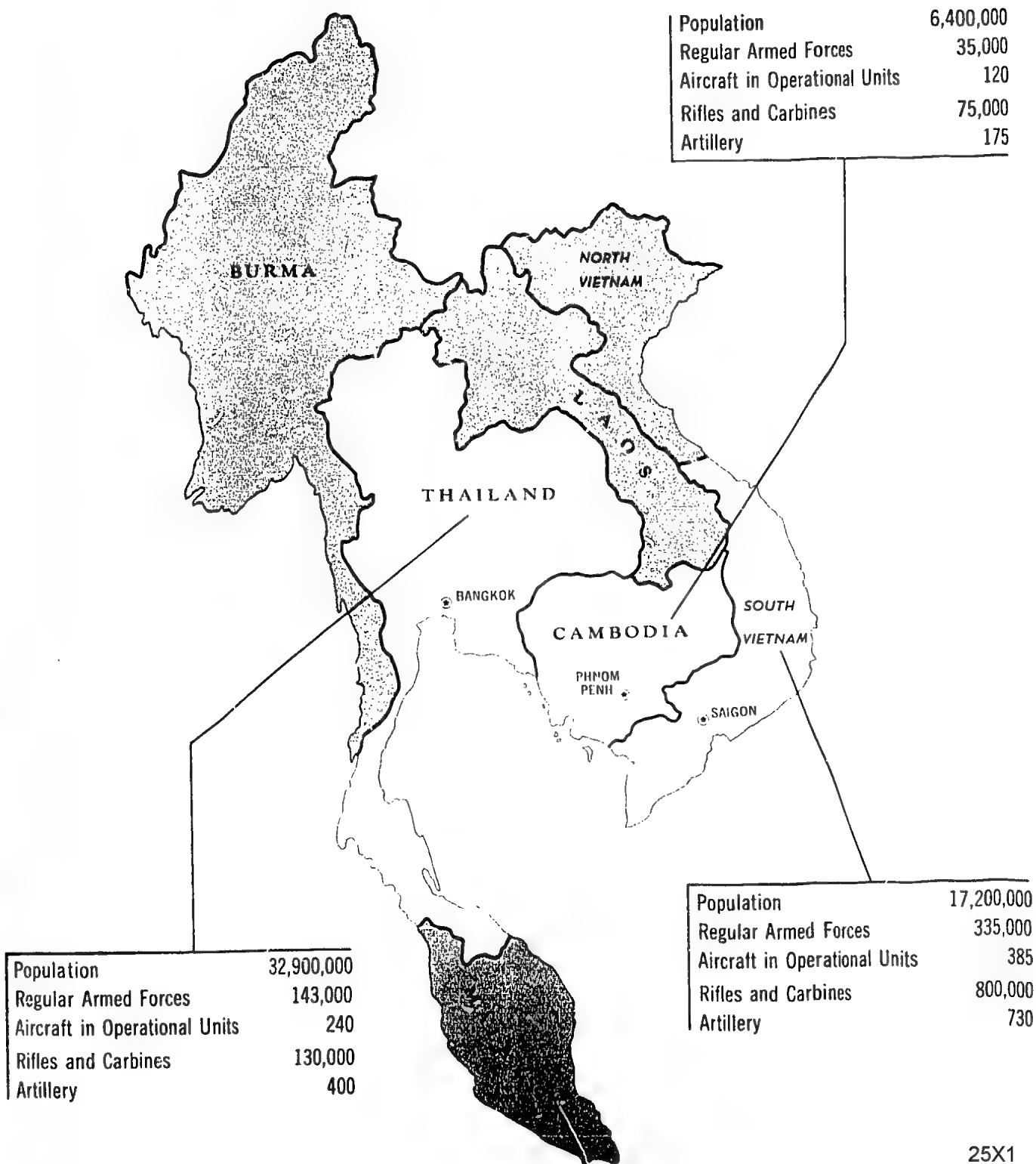
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Disposition of Military Aid

17. The estimated inventory of Cambodia's military materiel as of early 1968 was barely adequate for the order of battle of its armed forces. Originally, some of the small arms and munitions received as part of the more recent military aid shipments probably were intended for distribution to Cambodia's underarmed paramilitary forces. About 25,000 members of the volunteer village defense forces were unarmed, and many of the others were equipped only with old US and French small arms. There are also tentative plans to arm more than the current level of 5,000 members from the government-sponsored youth group. Recent deliveries, however, may have gone to a few infantry battalions newly formed to meet the dissident threat.

18. Despite internal difficulties with dissident groups, Cambodia's major justification for increased military aid lies in the potential threat it sees in the relatively powerful military arms of neighboring Thailand and South Vietnam. These countries are Cambodia's traditional enemies. The disparities in military strength among the three countries, as shown in Figure 2, make it clear that Cambodia remains ill-prepared for sustained combat operations against either Thailand or South Vietnam even with substantial additions to its military inventories.

# CAMBODIA, THAILAND, and SOUTH VIETNAM COMPARATIVE MILITARY STRENGTHS 1967 ESTIMATE



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19. Although such considerations would not prevent corrupt officials from diverting small amounts of Communist aid to Cambodia to Communist forces in South Vietnam, large diversions of Cambodian stocks probably would be less palatable to Cambodian military personnel than assistance to the Communists in the transit of arms and ammunition which were clandestinely brought into Cambodia.

Possible Diversions from Cambodian Stock

20. There have been a number of reports in recent years suggesting that the Vietnamese Communists are receiving significant amounts of military supplies directly from Cambodian stocks. Should such diversions occur, they would presumably be either a consequence of large-scale unauthorized sales by the Cambodian military establishment -- there almost certainly is some minor gunrunning by enterprising junior officers -- or a far-reaching deal between Phnom Penh and Peking, the major supplier of small arms to the Cambodian Army.

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For their part, there is some reason to question whether the Communists are willing to entrust what obviously would be an important supply route with a non-Communist leader whose politics are dictated by his own view of what Cambodia's national interest requires at any given time.

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Lines of Communication in Cambodian Border AreasNortheast

25. The Vietnamese Communists use the lines of communication in northeastern Cambodia primarily for the movement of rice from Cambodia to South Vietnam. The volume of arms reaching Communist forces via Cambodian roads and waterways in northeastern Cambodia probably is insignificant relative to the flow through Laos directly into South Vietnam. Route 96/110, which the Communists recently have extended southward from Laos through Cambodia's northeastern salient and parallel to the Cambodian border in South Vietnam, undoubtedly carries arms and ammunition and other supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Cambodians, however, have not been implicated in such traffic and only some 15 miles of isolated Cambodian territory\* in the salient is transited. This region of northeastern Cambodia has been under Communist control for several years and is the site of a major Communist base area.

26. Although reports and aerial reconnaissance indicate that the Tonle Kong is used extensively by the Communists for the movement upstream from Cambodia of rice, other foodstuffs, and gasoline for Communist forces in southern Laos and adjoining areas of South Vietnam,

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\* North Vietnamese maps portray the area as a part of Vietnam.



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[redacted] Again, although the possibility of isolated arms shipments to the Vietnamese Communists over the Cambodian portion of Route 19 cannot be ignored, the Communist supply network through Laos and South Vietnam, and especially the new extension of Route 96/110, should make the use of Route 19 less attractive to the Communists. Moreover, considerable arms movements in Cambodia in the border area served by Route 19 are associated with a Cambodian military buildup directed against internal dissidence and Communist encroachment.

28. There are very tentative signs, however, that the Communists may hope to make greater use of northeastern Cambodia for the movement of supplies in the near future. A branch from Communist Route 110, extended into South Vietnam, is being constructed in a southwesterly direction. If this road should be extended an additional 23 miles through difficult terrain in Cambodia, it would connect with a new road under construction by the Cambodians north from the Tonle San and provide potential access to the Cambodian road network. Extensive Communist use of a segment of Cambodia's road system would require Cambodian compliance, but it is doubtful that Cambodia would be this cooperative.\*\*

Midwest

29. Cambodia's road and waterway networks in the border regions of southern Mondolkiri and in Kratie, Kompong Cham, and Svay Rieng Provinces are more likely candidates for the movement of arms and ammunition to the Vietnamese Communists. Communist forces in the III Corps area of South Vietnam are less easily supplied from North Vietnam via Laos than those troops in the northern half of South Vietnam. If

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Cambodian officials are involved in the smuggling, the location of Cambodian military camps in mideast border areas would provide a cover for military shipments to the Communists. The relatively heavy traffic on the Cambodian routes in this area, particularly on Route 7 through Snuol, would make detection of such individual shipments more difficult. There are many low-level reports of Communist arms traffic in the Snuol area. The normal smuggling of various goods between the two countries, the ample number of waterways in parts of mideastern Cambodia, and even the existence of trails which could support truck traffic add to the potential for clandestine movement of arms across the border.

South east

30. The roads, rivers, and smaller waterways of Prey Veng, Kandal, Takeo, and Kampot Provinces provide feasible routes for the movement of arms and ammunition from Cambodia either directly or via the mideastern Cambodian provinces to the Communist forces in South Vietnam's Delta region. These forces are furthest removed from Communist overland supply routes. Furthermore, the lightly patrolled coast of Kampot Province would appear to provide an opportune area for clandestine transit of Communist arms shipments.

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The traditional cross-border commercial traffic would screen such movement. Although South Vietnamese military convoys which escort shipping on the Mekong River between Cambodia and South Vietnam make the Mekong a less probable route for arms smuggling inside South Vietnam itself, the river could be used within Cambodia to move such traffic near to the border.

31. In view of the nature of the Cambodian border along the III and IV Corps areas of South Vietnam, the commercial traffic in the area, the requirements of Communist troops for arms and ammunition in the III and IV Corps areas, and the dearth of indications of successful arms shipments overland through South Vietnam or directly by sea to the III and IV Corps areas (see below), the numerous reports of arms shipments into these areas from Cambodia must be given some credence, despite many inconsistencies with respect to details.

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Alternate Communist Means of Access to the Southern Provinces of South Vietnam

32. [ ] it is unlikely that the Communists in the southern half of South Vietnam would depend wholly on movement through Cambodia [ ]

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[ ] the small requirements of Communist troops in the southern half of South Vietnam for armaments could be satisfied by only an occasional boatload, or even by periodic concentrated overland porter traffic.

33. US Market Time operations have greatly increased the risks to the Communists of sea infiltration over the South Vietnamese coast since 1965 and have resulted in the destruction or capture of several hundred tons of arms and ammunition in Communist attempts to breach Allied coastal patrols. The coastal area of South Vietnam that adjoins Cambodia, however, seems to offer some potential for Communist access. Communist small craft conceivably could move from Cambodian coastal waters to these shallow, difficult-to-patrol South Vietnamese coastal waters for offloading in Viet Cong-held territory.

34. With respect to overland transportation, Route 14, the principal and most direct route linking the northern and southern provinces of South Vietnam, passes through Communist controlled or contested territory within South Vietnam. Communist road construction in the tri-border area suggests that they may intend to make greater use of Route 14, although there is no conclusive evidence even of current Communist use. The laxity of control at South Vietnamese checkpoints and the opportunities usually present for bribery of government officials might offset Allied surveillance of this route.

The Government's Role

35. Prince Sihanouk consistently has proclaimed Cambodia's neutrality concerning the war in Vietnam. Although he has openly avowed his sympathy for the Viet Cong in their struggle against the "South Vietnamese puppet regime and its imperialist allies" and has acknowledged the donation of medical supplies and sales of rice and other supplies to the Viet Cong,

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he repeatedly has disclaimed any acts, such as the supplying of arms to the Viet Cong or the authorization of their use of Cambodian territory that would violate Cambodia's neutrality.

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Furthermore, Cambodian forces have, since March, undertaken searches for enemy activities in at least three border areas pinpointed by evidence presented by the United States. At least one Cambodian village has been cleared of Vietnamese Communists, and at least two Communist arms caches were uncovered. Recently captured Viet Cong documents have referred to losses of arms caches to Cambodian troops.

36. Additional measures recently have been taken to reduce all types of smuggling to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces. In September 1967 the province chief and other officials in Ratanakiri Province were replaced because of their involvement in smuggling activities. In February 1968 the National Liberation Front representative in Phnom Penh was warned by a high Cambodian official that "serious obstacles" might result if the Viet Cong did not cut back on smuggling and other cross-border activities. In April the government replaced all government officials and police stationed in the Snuol-Mimot area along the South Vietnamese border with new personnel. Also in April the government called for the intensification of measures to stop smuggling and noted that severe punishment would be inflicted on all parties guilty of smuggling.

37. Arrests for smuggling apparently have increased in Cambodia in recent years and the risks involved in smuggling have increased accordingly, but the tradition of corruption and smuggling in Cambodia is not likely to be overcome. Cambodia's concern with smuggling, and particularly with the smuggling of rice and other foodstuffs, dates back many years, but Cambodian success in combating these activities has been far less than complete. Although traffic in armaments has been publicly disclaimed, Cambodian personnel and vehicles -- military as well as civilian -- have been implicated in the movement of arms and ammunition to the Communists by many

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informants, enemy ralliers, and prisoners.

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38. On the other hand, Cambodian-Viet Cong relations currently are at a low ebb because of suspected Viet Cong support for the Khmer Reds. If this situation continues, the government possibly could exert enough further pressure against smuggling activities to bring about a significant reduction. In any event, the Communists surely will continue to conceal to the best of their ability any use of Cambodian territory or personnel for the movement of arms and ammunition to South Vietnam.

39. The Communists probably have had some success in acquiring material from Cambodian stocks and in smuggling arms and ammunition through Cambodia, both from the sea and to a lesser extent over Cambodian roads and waterways from Laos. Cambodian military and civilian personnel -- although perhaps not the highest officials -- appear to have been involved in some of this traffic. Certainly, however, some reports on cross-border traffic in arms also reflect Communist use of Cambodian territory as a repository for arms and ammunition delivered via routes through South Vietnam itself. Although it is not possible to determine the relative volumes moved over specific routes, it appears that cross-border arms traffic is heaviest in the Cambodian provinces bordering the III and IV Corps areas.

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